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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/02/2017

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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: CONTAINING ERITREA CAN HELP SOMALIA AND
THE REGION

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Yamamoto for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

Summary:

¶1. (SBU) Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles delivered his six month report to Parliament on March 29 in which two of the three topics he raised centered on the conflict in Somalia and the threat from Eritrea. He highlighted Ethiopia,s efforts to strengthen the TFG, provide force protection for Ugandan and AMISOM troops, and promote Somalia,s national reconciliation conference through dialogue with the Hawiye clan to contain the threat of extremism and stabilize Mogadishu. A problem for stability in Somalia is Eritrea. Characterizing Eritrea as a state sponsor of terrorism, Prime Minister Meles outlined Eritrea,s regional destabilizing activities: support for extremism in Somalia; for a terrorist group caught in Addis Ababa during the African Union Summit at the end of January; for extremists seeking to overthrow Ethiopia; and support for the taking of Ethiopian and British Embassy hostages along the border. Meles, in an emotional tone, replied during the question and answer period that Ethiopia has &fully accepted8 the EEBC decision, even with its flaws. Ethiopia is committed to resolving the border conflict with Eritrea and calls for discussions to resolve differences and normalize relations. But Eritrea does not seek peace, Meles states, but the overthrow of the Ethiopian government.

¶2. (S/NF) This Embassy believes that Meles and the Ethiopian leadership, after their recent two weeks of party discussions, appear to be focused on an approach which urges the international community, even at the U.N., to pressure Eritrea to cease its destabilizing activities, especially in Somalia. Further, Ethiopia accepts the EEBC decision so lack of progress on the border conflict lies with Eritrea. Meles is making the case for international containment and isolation of Eritrea as the best way to cut off some assistance to extremists in Somalia and ease tensions in the region. End summary.

Speech to Parliament: Somalia
Challenges/Contain Eritrea

¶3. (SBU) Meles delivered an hour long overview of the past six months, highlighting reports provided by his ministers on the state of the economy, Somalia, and Eritrea as a state sponsor of terrorism. Meles assured parliamentarians that he is bringing back the troops from Somalia, but in stages. He emphasized that the ENDF is strengthening the TFG, and providing force protection for AMISOM troops coming into Somalia. He cautioned that the slowness of the deployment of AMISOM troops meant that the ENDF could not precipitously depart Somalia without creating a chaotic situation.

¶4. (SBU) During the question and answer period, Meles responded to opposition leaders demanding that ENDF troops leave by noting that the ENDF is leaving in stages, and cautioned again that the ENDF is helping to stabilize the TFG and the situation in Somalia. He noted that the problem is Mogadishu. He explained that extremist elements were engaged in violence and that discussions with the Hawiye clan to contain and eliminate extremism was continuing. Ethiopia and the international community must help stabilize Somalia. He also highlighted the importance of the upcoming national reconciliation conference.

¶5. (SBU) The Prime Minister drew a parallel with the problem in Somalia with the destabilizing activities of Eritrea. He said Ethiopia fully accepted the EEBC decision even with its flaws. He called on Eritrea to resolve the border problem, noting that discussions to resolve problems and normalize relations were essential to lasting peace. During the question session, Meles was emotional in asking why Eritrea did not want to resolve the border dispute. He characterized Eritrea as a state sponsor of terrorism. Eritrea supports

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extremism in Somalia, seeking to destabilize the country. Eritrean agents were caught during the African Union Summit at the end of January. Border tensions are due to Eritrea supporting rebel groups seeking to overthrow Ethiopia. Finally, the taking of British Embassy and Ethiopian hostages along the border was a clear act of terrorism by Eritrea. Meles hinted that he was developing a case against Eritrea and was reviewing if and how to raise it at the United Nations.

Fixated on Eritrea:

¶6. (S/NF) After two weeks of meetings by the ruling party (EPRDF) and the secretariat (TPLF), Ethiopian officials have embarked on a campaign to isolate Eritrea and to attack it as a state sponsor of terrorism. State Minister Takeda called select Ambassadors from the diplomatic corps to charge Eritrea as a terrorist state behind the kidnappings of five British Embassy staff and nine Ethiopians. Meles, comments articulate the case Ethiopia is drawing against Eritrea and their view that Eritrea seeks the overthrow of the Ethiopian government. With nearly two divisions committed to Somalia operations, Ethiopia is not seeking a second front war with Eritrea. It is clearly seeking international pressure and sanctions against Eritrea to contain its destabilizing activities in the region.

Comment:

¶7. (S/NF) We have advised the Prime Minister and his senior leadership to separate the kidnappings and Eritrea,s involvement, stressing the humanitarian nature of the continued captivity of the Ethiopian victims. In addition, any case against Eritrea should be raised by other countries. Any charges levied by Ethiopia would be viewed only in the context of their border conflict. The aggressive approach to

Eritrea and Meles, emotional comments on Eritrea, indicate Ethiopia,s single minded focus on linking some of the extremist activities in Somalia to Eritrea, and that resolution of Somalia,s problems depends on the international community containing and isolating Isaias and the Eritreans.

18. (S/NF) Of note was Meles, emphatic statement that Ethiopia fully accepts the EEBC decision even with its flaws and its preparation to demarcate the border if Eritrea concurs with discussions to normalize relations. While Meles echoed the U.S. negotiating position from last year and some EU nations attempt to push for direct talks between Eritrea and Ethiopia, Eritrea has refused any talks with Ethiopia. It is clear that Eritrea,s efforts to strike at Ethiopia, through Somalia and rebel groups fighting Ethiopia, and Ethiopia,s efforts to marginalize Eritrea,s influence may well lead to greater public accusations and charges, spelling greater uncertainty for the prospect of regional stability. End Comment.
YAMAMOTO